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Long Beach Detective Persistent with Port Security

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Long Beach Detective Persistent with Port Security

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For Candice Wright, implementing her vision of port security not only took academic research and years of professional insight, but a great deal of persistence.

Her perseverance paid off in October 2012 with the launch of a new intelligence-sharing system used in support of the Maritime Coordination Center at the Port of Long Beach/Los Angeles. The program is titled SAN (Situational Awareness Network). SAN is being used to coordinate water operations as well as disseminate threat information for a bevy of agencies.



Wright, a detective with the Long Beach, California, Police Department, graduated from the Center for Homeland Defense and Security in 2007. Wright is assigned to the Port of Long Beach/Los Angeles and enrolled at the Center for Homeland Defense and Security with a goal to bolster port security, especially by integrating the private sector into security measures.

Five years after graduation, she is seeing her thesis research applied on the ground. Or, more precisely, in the water.

Wright's thesis urges applying Network Centric Warfare theory to security practices to "perpetuate a cycle of preparedness in the seaport, thus enhancing situational awareness for improved security." The thesis highlighted gaps among entities "responsible for securing the intermodal supply chain throughout the port complex."

During her research, Wright learned of the software SharePoint, an off-the-shelf product used in a variety of different ways by public safety agencies. She customized the software to enhance information sharing among private and public entities operating in port areas of responsibility.

Wright entered the CHDS master's degree program well aware of the gap she wished her research to address.

The jurisdictional responsibilities within the Port of Long Beach/Los Angeles include more than 25 law enforcement agencies from the federal, state and local levels. This makes coordinated response and information sharing allowing for a daily common operating picture a challenge for the region. For example, the Long Beach Police Department may be conducting an exercise in the vicinity, but the Coast Guard and other area law enforcement agencies may not necessarily be aware of the activity; de-confliction of operations was an issue.

"I kind of worked backwards," Wright said. "I knew there was a gap but I wasn't sure how to fix that gap."

The software provided the cyber-infrastructure for the Port of Long Beach/Los Angeles recently established Maritime Coordination Center. The Center began operations in October 2011 and is aimed at coordinating information-sharing and response capabilities to enhance border security from the California/Mexican border to the county of San Luis Obispo on California's Central Coast. The need for enhanced collaboration among federal, State and Local law enforcement water assets was due in large part to the rise of panga's (Mexican fishing vessels) used for migrant and narcotic smuggling coming from Southern California's border with Mexico.

Fellow agencies need not purchase the SharePoint software. Rather, they simply need to join the website operating from the Center.

The Center operates as a sort of smaller-scale fusion center, said Wright, by sharing information with more than 70 local, state, and federal agencies. The initial launch included 300 users. This approach helps diminish apprehensions some agencies may have about sharing their intelligence with other organizations.

"We wanted to put actionable intelligence out there for our private partners and our public partners so that we would be on the same page for intelligence," Wright said.

And, Wright sought to make participation cost effective for fellow agencies.

"The Long Beach Police Department and Port of Long Beach host this so there isn't huge cost factor," she said. "Not everybody has to have SharePoint because it is web-based. You just have to be a member of the site. We're trying to make this as practical and affordable as possible so we can get the most participation."

Wright is developing a similar website she hopes to complete by December that would include the private entities working within the Port of Long Beach/Los Angeles as well as public entities. Eventually the information-sharing format would extend to ports farther north on the West Coast, such as Oakland, California, and Seattle.

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